



SENATOR

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Year in Review – Edition II

LAND USE

Land Bank Fast Track package (HB 4480-4484 and 4488) will aid urban redevelopment by establishing an authority to clear property titles and move tax reverted property to private ownership. The legislation creates the process to redevelop abandoned properties by providing a funding source to clear titles and expedite redevelopment. In lieu of general property tax for land that is returned to private ownership, the legislation creates a tax with 50 percent going to the local communities and 50 percent going to make the authority self-supporting. The Land Bank Fast Track package follows the recommendations made by the bi-partisan Land Use Leadership Council. *(Presented to Governor)*

Better Zoning -- The Senate also took up and passed several other recommendations of the Land Use Leadership Council that now are law. The Quality of Life Zoning Violations legislation *(House Bills 5216-5220 and 5224 and presented to the governor)* makes it easier for communities to cleanup blighted properties through administrative hearings rather than seeking a court order. House Bill 4284 *(Public Act 226 of 2003)* allows neighboring communities and municipalities to form joint planning commissions to better coordinate regional zoning efforts.

Principle Shopping Districts -- Another recommendation of the Land Use Leadership Council, House Bill 4263 provides cities with the tools they need to make improvements to certain areas in order to improve the local business retail climate. *(Public Act 209 of 2003)* Planned Unit Development. The legislation *(House Bills 4666-4668)* allows a municipality to approve a planned unit development with open space not connected to the development. The legislation was recommended by the Land Use Leadership Council. *(Public Acts 227-229 of 2003)*

AFFORDABLE & ACCESSIBLE HEALTHCARE

Care and Competitiveness -- Senate Republicans made it easier and less expensive for employers to provide healthcare insurance coverage to their employees by eliminating tax penalty on employer-funded health benefits. Senate Bills 672 and 673 will reduce by 50 percent

the taxes paid by employers on healthcare benefits under the state's Single Business Tax by 2007. (*Public Acts 240 & 241 of 2003*)

Small Market Reform -- Senate Republicans took the lead in making it more economical for small businesses to provide healthcare coverage by allowing Blue Cross Blue Shield (the state's largest insurer) greater options for providing insurance. Specifically, the legislation improves the insurability of the Blues' small group line of business. It also modernizes financial reporting requirements for the insurer and sets minimum participation rules for groups of less than 100 subscribers. Under this new law, the Blues are now authorized to contract with out-of-state healthcare providers and to own other disability insurers. (*Public Act 59 of 2003*)

PROTECTING OUR COMMUNITIES

The Michigan Driver Responsibility Program -- Senate Bill 509 establishes a fee program for drivers who accrue seven or more points in two years or for being found guilty of specific driving-related offenses like drunk driving. This law models a New Jersey statute that has been credited with reducing the number of habitually bad drivers by more than 25 percent. (*Public Act 165 of 2003*)

Senate Cracks Down on Crystal Meth -- Senate Bills 648-652, 698 and 777 provide tools for law enforcement and increased penalties for those who participate in the production of methamphetamine by owning or possessing the places, chemicals or equipment used in production of the illegal stimulant. (*Presented to Governor*)

TRANSPORTATION

Critical Road Projects -- Michigan's economic future depends on a safe and reliable transportation system. That is why Senate Republicans made reinstating the 34 road projects scuttled in early 2003 by Governor Granholm a top priority. Republicans were successful in restoring funding for 13 of the 34 key road projects eliminated by the governor, with assurances from the administration that the remaining projects would be included in the Michigan Department of Transportation's 5-year plan. In every case, the projects dealt with existing congestion and safety issues.

ELECTION CONSOLIDATION

Streamlined Elections -- Senate Republicans accomplished one of their long-standing priorities: consolidating the dates for municipal elections. The four consolidated dates are the fourth Tuesday in February and the first Tuesday following the first Monday in May, August and November. A fifth "floater" date is possible for school districts to hold an election for a millage or bond. All elections in the state will now be conducted by county, township or municipal clerks. (*Presented to Governor; Senate Bill 887 and House Bills 4820 & 4822-4828*)

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Identity Theft -- The Senate overwhelmingly passed a broad effort to stop the explosion of identity theft in Michigan and help victims get their good credit back. Identity theft affected more than 160,000 people in the United States in 2002. Key aspects of this legislative package would: Prohibit denying or reducing credit to ID theft victims; stop soliciting or extending credit to consumers by mailing unsolicited checks and similar items; give police and prosecutors the power to open criminal investigations and bring cases in the jurisdiction where the victim resides or where the crime was committed; create a standardized certificate ID theft victims can use to prove their identity has been used for fraudulent purposes so they can restore their credit histories more quickly, and; stop individuals, companies, government organizations, including schools and universities, or other legal entities from disclosing to a third-party or publicly displaying the Social Security number of a person unless that person consents or the disclosure is authorized by law. (*Awaiting House action; Senate Bills 220, 657, 792-795, 797-798 & 803; Senate Resolutions 182, 183 & 186*)

Stronger Credit Unions -- Michigan consumers will see better services from their credit unions and more people will be able to join the non-profit financial institution under the Senate Republican-initiated Credit Union Act of 2003. The act empowers credit unions to establish updated and appropriate guidelines and serve a mobile and changing membership, as well as be subject to the safety and soundness provisions enforced by state regulators. In addition, the legislation enables credit unions to continue serving entrepreneurs and small businesses with effective commercial loans and other services. The original Michigan Credit Union Act was approved in 1925, with minor updates in 1986. (*Public Acts 215-221 of 2003*)

BALANCED BUDGET

Senate Republicans led the way in putting Michigan's fiscal house in order. A slow-growing economy and depressed tax revenues in 2003 forced lawmakers to trim nearly \$2 billion from state spending. Yet, Senate Republicans were able to balance the budget while managing to keep funding for key priorities – like education and other critical services – at or near previous levels. The budget negotiations between the Republican-controlled Legislature and the Democrat administration showed that bipartisan cooperation held the day in 2003.